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Matter of Fact By Jo

The False Accounting

LAST WEEK, in the semi-final stage of the Berlin crisis the Secretary of Defense of the United States offered the country an accounting. It was a false accounting.

That does not mean that Neil McElroy is a dishonest man. In the stock market boom of the late '30s, the vision of many honest men was irresistibly deformed by the atmosphere of the times. Their eyes were blinded to debits and credulous towards credits; and so these wholly honest men published wholly misleading balance sheets in the same fashion, in the atmosphere generated by the President's budget—mania, blindness to debits and extreme credulity towards credit now prevail in the Pentagon.

The McElroy balance sheet, offered to the American Association of Newspaper Publishers, was first of all misleading about the priorities governing the current defense budget. "National security," he declared, had been the only test; and he denied that the defense program had been "determined by budgetary considerations." He forgot to relate the famous episode in the National Security Council, when Under Secretary of Defense Donald Quarles timidly urged that the national security demanded larger defense investments.

The President responded with the famous flush-faced anger which so frightens his subordinates—but markedly fails to intimidate the enemies of this republic. Budget-balancing, he told Quarles, "ends national security." That settled the matter.

Worse still, the McElroy balance sheet was misleading about the condition of the

nuclear deterrent, on which the whole western strategic concept entirely depends. Speaking primarily of the Strategic Air Command, McElroy smoothly promised that the bomber forces will be kept in any status of alert required to insure their ability to deliver unacceptable punishment to any nation which might attack us.

IN CONTRAST, the brilliant Strategic Air Commander, Gen. Thomas Power, has given sworn testimony that in its present alert status, SAC should conceivably be "knocked out." With no missile-seeing radars as yet in position, SAC has zero warning against a Soviet missile strike. With zero warning, SAC has only been authorized to maintain a 15-minute alert. Such an alert is utterly valueless, if the Soviets simply acquire a few hundred more long-range missiles than the national intelligence estimates allow. When and if this happens, unless SAC has meanwhile been authorized to maintain an air-borne alert, it will in fact be possible to "knock out" SAC.

Worst of all, the McElroy accounting was shockingly misleading on the key matter of the Soviet missile capability. Our own admittedly imperfect long-range missile, the Atlas, now has a claimed "circular probable error" of one mile. In other words, it can be relied on to hit within one mile of its target. The Soviets have been in the missile business much longer than we have, and they have worked much harder at it. Thus their long-range missile must be expected to be at least as good as the Atlas.

If that is so, they need a very small number of missiles indeed—in the extremely low hundreds—to knock out both SAC and the United States in our present completely "soft" condition of no

and no counter-ones in "hard" The current six missiles per hour could be immediately raised to 18 per month, and it could be quite rapidly raised to 36 per month. By the measuring stick of this American capability, an all-out Soviet production effort could give the Kremlin its long-range missile requirement in a fortnight, a small number of months.

THE NATIONAL intelligence estimates, perhaps reflecting the present blue sky atmosphere of the Pentagon, do not concede the Soviets a fatally dangerous missile capability at any early date. McElroy's assertions were squarely based upon the estimates. But the central point that McElroy omitted concerned these estimates. We are now making the whole future of this country on the single assumption that the vast and secret Soviet treasury has not managed to produce a few hundred weapons, which the Kremlin has long been working about to produce. This is like a corporation assuming its liabilities are only \$100,000, when the liabilities may well be \$100 million.

What the intelligence estimators call a "strategic warning" has already been given to us, in the form of the Berlin crisis, which this reporter is now going abroad to cover on the spot. The conviction of the masters of the Kremlin that they have achieved a great upset of the world balance of military power, is the obvious reason why they are threatening Berlin at this time. You may believe, this reporter happens to believe, that there is no immediate danger of war. But McElroy-style accounting continues to prevail, and nothing more is done to redress the military balance, the future danger may be very great indeed.

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